Statement of the Fourth Bologna Policy Forum
Yerevan, 14-15 May 2015

We, the Ministers responsible for Higher Education and Heads of Delegation to the Fourth Bologna Policy Forum met in Yerevan to reaffirm and further our cooperation in developing higher education whose public authorities, higher education institutions, students and staff are committed to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. We underline our interest in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and in using its principles as a successful example of cooperation in higher education, to be considered in other regional contexts. We also recognize the contribution by other regions, through their own experience of policy and practice, to the further development of the EHEA.

Political instability in many of our countries, a high level of unemployment and migration arising from economic and social crisis and lack of access to higher education are among the challenges that we are facing. At the same time national awakening in the countries is arising hopes of the people for more democratic and tolerant societies providing opportunities for personal development as well as development of quality higher education. Reforms of higher education should further the development of democratic culture and equip our societies with the knowledge, understanding, and skills to help address the challenges we face. Protecting staff and students in ensuring the academic freedom, integrity and autonomy of higher education institutions is a key to achieving this.

Moreover mobility of students and staff facilitates exchange and creation of new knowledge and helps to build mutual trust and understanding. The rapid technological developments will impact on higher education and the way in which it will be reformed.

Thus the policy dialogue and cooperation between the EHEA and the countries of the Middle East (ME), North Africa (NA), Asia (AS) (MENAAS) need to be continued and strengthened, taking due account of the diverse higher education systems as well as political, economic and cultural landscapes of our regions and countries. We have identified a number of common challenges that should drive our joint cooperation for the future; these include demographic changes, graduate unemployment, the economic and political crises affecting many of our countries, the prevalence of stereotypes, insufficient intercultural dialogue and increasing extremism and radicalization. We will work with the academic community to develop the key role of higher education in meeting these challenges and creating the societies we want. Moreover, we would strive to find ways in which education reforms can help create the societies we want.

We will therefore build on what we have in common while also enabling individual education systems to draw on their particular strengths and traditions. Diversity and the various aspects of the policy dialogue imply involvement of all levels: regional, national and institutional.

The Fourth Bologna Policy Forum is focused on reinforcing cooperation between the EHEA and MENAAS countries that are bordering the EHEA countries. It is important to ensure that higher education is ready to respond to the challenges today. The reforms of higher education will improve quality of higher education and will help to tackle unemployment especially among young people and especially young women. It is also focused on the role of structural reforms, including mobility schemes and joint programmes.

The EHEA structural reforms and transparency instruments as well as similar initiatives in other regions should serve as a basis to further regional cooperation, building on the results of current projects implemented by the different international organisations, national authorities and higher education institutions. These include the use of learning outcomes and of common reference points in the design and delivery of study programmes, quality assurance capacity building, the development of qualifications frameworks, mobility and recognition as well as credit systems, joint degrees, doctoral education.

In our further cooperation, we will in particular give priority to:

- Developing national qualifications frameworks, including developing methodologies to establish compatibility between national frameworks within the EHEA – aligned with the QF-EHEA – and national frameworks developed by MEENAS countries.
- Developing cooperation in quality assurance, with a view to further developing mutual trust in our education systems and their qualifications. We will encourage quality assurance agencies from participating countries to work towards inclusion in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).
- Improving the mutual recognition of qualifications, through improved information, the joint development and dissemination of recognition practice and methodology. We encourage UNESCO to initiate review of the regional conventions for the Mediterranean Region and the Arab States with a view to incorporating the key principles and provisions of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention as well as of UNESCO regional conventions that have been revised recently, as well as to reactivate the MERIC Network.
- Cooperating in developing and implementing credit transfer system, taking due account of ECTS and its recently revised Users' Guide.

At institutional level, we will encourage and support academic cooperation for the development of joint projects to implement the policies and tools needed for the full implementation of reforms and for the development of student-centered

learning environments. The involvement of the academic community, including students and academics, as well as other key stakeholders, is essential in development and implementation of these reforms.

Furthermore, in the light of recent political instability and attacks on democracy and the rule of law in a number of countries, we underline the importance of continuing cooperation between higher education institutions and our commitment to support exchanges of students and staff and joint projects to strengthen the capacity of higher education institutions in the EHEA and in partner countries to contribute to democratic developments based on high quality education and research.

For the successful further cooperation between the EHEA and our countries it is important to take account of other regional processes.

We, the Ministers responsible for Higher Education and Heads of Delegation to the Fourth Bologna Policy Forum, recognize that successful policy dialogue requires sustained use of a variety of working methods, including conferences, seminars, working groups, studies, pilot projects and peer learning activities, between the Bologna Policy Fora. We commit to piloting such cooperation for our countries and regions and ask the Bologna Secretariat, in close cooperation with the BFUG, the Bologna Board and representatives of the MEENAS countries to oversee this cooperation to define subject areas for collaboration and develop a timetable and plan of activities by the next BFUG meeting.

The next Bologna Policy Forum will be organized in 2018 in France in conjunction with the Ministerial Conference.